



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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**Message of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld  
To the Men and Women of the Department of Defense  
And the United States Armed Forces  
In Observance of African American History Month**

It is with great pleasure that I join you in marking African American History Month—a time to remember and reaffirm our common commitment to justice, equality and opportunity. Those of us serving in this remarkable institution—whether military or civilian—bear a special responsibility on occasions such as this. Indeed, we are fortunate to serve as both sentinels of the past and scouts for the future.

As sentinels of the past, we carry a unique understanding and appreciation for the lessons of history—lessons that need repeating—of African Americans who have worn this nation's uniform and served with distinction at home and abroad. As scouts for the future, we are also proud to inherit an institution that for over half a century has been a pioneer for equal opportunity and which today is a beacon to America as the most integrated institution in the nation.

Because we are an example to others, each of us also has a responsibility to each other—to ensure that our military and civilian ranks are defined by adherence to the highest standards of equal justice and professional ethics. In so doing, we can build an even stronger military and an even stronger nation. As the President reminds us in his proclamation on the purpose of this month, this is a time to “teach our children, and all Americans, to rise above brutality and bigotry and to be champions of liberty, human dignity and equality.”

As Secretary of Defense, I encourage everyone in this Department to embrace the spirit of which the President spoke. Together, we can remain a model for the nation. Together, we can make the meaning and lessons of this month real not only for African Americans, but for all Americans.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. H. Rumsfeld", is located at the bottom right of the page.

